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P 280640Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6096  
INFO RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0449  
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0547  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 1361  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2143  
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0700  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0462  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 1481  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0725  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 2086  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0253

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000328

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RW](#)  
SUBJECT: BBC TEAM MEETS WITH GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING SUSPENSION  
OF BROADCASTS

REF: A. KIGALI 302  
[1](#)B. KIGALI 256

Classified By: CDA Sim for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) On May 21, Jerry Timmins, the Head of BBC World Service for Africa and the Middle East, met with Rwandan officials to discuss the April 25 suspension of BBC Kinyarwanda Service broadcasts in Rwanda (ref B). According to BBC personnel who participated in the five-hour discussion, Information Minister Louise Mushikiwabo took a tough line, pressing for an apology and an admission that the BBC broadcast had incited ethnic hatred and propagated the idea of a double genocide. In support of this contention, BBC personnel said, Mushikiwabo used a distorted transcript of the offending BBC broadcast that was reportedly prepared by the government-controlled Media High Council (MHC). This transcript apparently took statements out of context and mis-translated key phrases. BBC officials presented Mushikiwabo with their own translation of the program, pointing out the deficiencies in the MHC transcript.

[1](#)2. (C) BBC officials reportedly denied any fanning of ethnic hatreds or suggestion of genocide denial in the BBC program. The Africa/Middle East Head offered various formulas for restarting a positive relationship between the BBC and the Government of Rwanda (GOR). These included a reaffirmation of the BBC's commitment to balanced and accurate reporting and editorial content, an offer to host Rwandan National Unification and Reconciliation Commission officers at BBC headquarters in London, and a continuation of an internship program for Rwandan journalists with the BBC. The BBC team asked for an immediate lifting of the suspension of Kinyarwanda Service transmissions by GOR facilities (the Service continues on short wave and internet podcasts), and the ending of a lengthy ban on local BBC personnel attending GOR events and press conferences. Mushikiwabo asked for these terms to be put in writing, and the BBC is preparing a communication in London.

[1](#)3. (C) The local head of the BBC told us on May 26 that absent the lifting of the ban on Kinyarwanda broadcasts and on BBC journalists' participation in local events, there would likely be no further negotiations. Nor would the BBC bow to Mushikiwabo's continuing demand for an apology. He added, however, if Mushikiwabo sought to portray the forthcoming BBC letter as an apology, the BBC likely would not contradict her. The BBC's central goal remained the resumption of local broadcasts and access to local events. In an interview in the government-associated New Times on May

27, Mushikiwabo claimed that the BBC had "acknowledged that something was wrong" with its programming, and that the BBC team had agreed to "make changes in programming." In a follow-up conversation, the local BBC head rejected these assertions, telling us that Timmins and the BBC made no such admissions or agreements to change programming.

¶4. (C) Comment. The GOR has very real concerns regarding inflammatory rhetoric on ethnic issues and attempts to alter the historical record of the genocide. However, misconstruing or excising nuanced remarks by political opponents ultimately does not advance the GOR's own goal of a reconciled, cooperative and strengthened society. Similarly

the public mischaracterization of discussions with the BBC does not advance the GOR's reputation internationally especially as it relates to the overall state of media freedom here. We will continue to urge the GOR to engage with the BBC to find an acceptable compromise that puts BBC's Kinyarwanda service back on the air. End comment.

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